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Author(s): A. Leo Oppenheim

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A. LEO OPPENHEIM

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WHAT CAN BE GATHERED from cuneiform sources about the position of the intellectual in Mesopotamian society is meager indeed. In this essay I can only try to outline the problems encountered in my quest to obtain a measure of vision on certain aspects of the topic.

Everyone knows that the Mesopotamians “wrote on clay.” In order to establish what the contents of these clay tablets indicate about those who wrote them we first need to know what was considered worthy of recording. This might tell us how the scribes were integrated into the framework of their society, that is, not only what their social and economic position was, but how they participated in such processes as political decision-making, administration of public and private affairs, artistic and scholarly activities, to mention at this point only the most frequently attested areas of scribal activity in Mesopotamia.

Data concerning scribes are plentiful. We know of thousands of names and places, we know of their activities, sometimes of their families, and we have a measure of insight into their training in schools.¹ Such information, however, rarely has bearing on the topic at hand, at least not at first sight. There are several ways of dealing with evidence of such a nature and magnitude: one can make use of computers or concentrate on an investigation of selected areas and periods.²

I have chosen here an approach which I believe is more revealing: to concentrate on a number of typical situations in which scribes are engaged in activities that relate them to those who are in positions of power. By singling out such situations, I shall attempt to determine the role and function of the scribe as intellectual—not as mere servant—in contact with those wielding political, spiritual, or economic influence. It will be essential always to keep in mind the time-frame and the specific political context in which such situations occur. The same may be said for certain basic difficulties inherent in the documents produced by these scribes.

With the exception of routine contracts, letters, and administrative records, such documents as royal pronouncements of every description, scholarly compendia, annals, literary compositions of all sorts exhibit two major and interconnected shortcomings that directly affect the heuristic value of the documentary evidence. We can best describe these shortcomings in negative terms, that is, in their contrasts to certain characteristic features of the two civilizations that likewise present themselves to us mainly, if not exclusively, through written documents: that of the Old Testament and that of the classical world. I am using this “negative” approach,

being well aware of its dangers inasmuch as these two civilizations are still very alive in our ways of thinking.

The first shortcoming in texts from Mesopotamia is the consistent absence of any expression of that civilization's uniqueness in the face of an alien background. Thus no need is felt to contrast native ways of thinking or doing things with those of the outside world. Nor are its merits and achievements ever set forth in contradistinction to foreign views and values. What is foreign does not attract curiosity nor is it rejected *per se*.³ It suffices to read the Old Testament passages dealing with the invasions of the Assyrian armies, and the sections of the Assyrian royal inscriptions that refer to the same events, to realize the contrast in approach. The stereotyped, self-centered, and repetitious rhetoric of the Assyrian texts with their narrow range of interest is in startling contrast to the often sensitive, reality-centered, and multilayered presentation of the Old Testament. At times, the latter coins phrases based on direct observation, or perceives situations that pointedly characterize basic Mesopotamian attitudes, to which cuneiform sources never seem to need to refer.⁴

The second and closely related negative characteristic is the absence of any polemic in cuneiform literature.⁵ There is no arguing against opposing views; we find here none of the revealing dialogue, which in Greek life and thought finds expression in court, in the theater, and in the lecture room.⁶ This might well be the main reason why we know so little about Mesopotamian attitudes toward the realities of the world around them and so much about the Greek. What information we can collect from cuneiform sources bears only more or less accidentally on these topics. What is written on clay typically either records past transactions or formulates traditionally determined relations; hardly ever is it intended to refute divergent opinions or to discuss the relative merits of alternate possibilities, and—least of all—to communicate to a reader information about the writer himself (except in letters), his background, and his civilization. No effort is made to relate within one conceptual frame differences in outlook or evaluation. Hence, all cuneiform texts have to be carefully interpreted with these curiously inhibiting and ultimately falsifying constraints in mind.

There is only one saving grace: these scribes have provided us with a staggering amount of evidence. Favored by a writing material that is as ubiquitous as it is permanent, the public scribes, the notaries, the scribes of the administrative centers, the poets, and the scholars left us a unique instance of an early civilization that not only knew writing but used it with an intensity paralleled in the first two or three millennia of the known history of man perhaps only by the Egyptians, who were much less fortunate in the selection of their writing material.

The scribes who wrote these many thousands of tablets not only are the fountainhead of all our information about Mesopotamia, but they are also the medium through which it reaches us. Their choice of subject matter as well as the stylistic forms that they devised for their messages determine what we, today, may learn about Mesopotamian civilization.

Both the selection of topics and the concomitant stylistic conventions that determine the pattern and even the wording of each and every cuneiform text—from a list of sheep to astronomical ephemerides—grow out of the specific milieu in which the scribe functioned. Presently I will outline a typology of such contexts.

Despite attested specializations,⁷ the Mesopotamian scribes kept the traditional unity of their activities by calling themselves simply "scribes" (*tupšarru*). In fact,

however, and from our point of view, these scribes acted in several distinct capacities, which ought to be differentiated and for which I am going to use such modern terms as the scribe as bureaucrat, the scribe as poet, and the scribe as scholar.⁸ Each had a definite function through which he served society. And, be they managers, literati, or intellectuals, the scribes contributed each in his way toward what one might justifiably call the intellectual history of Mesopotamia.

The habitat of the bureaucrat-scribe is well defined and remains the same throughout the history of Mesopotamia: it is the palace and the temple, the *oikos*-like structures or economic integration systems, which I have called the "Great Organizations."⁹ In that situation the most obvious and best known activity of the scribes is the recording of the flow of goods, staples, animals, and workmen through the circulation channels that keep the organization functioning. The recording was done under elaborate form requirements and produced an unbelievable amount of documents. It will take generations of Sumerologists and Assyriologists to analyze this evidence adequately and to establish the mechanics of the bureaucratic apparatus and to trace its internal history.¹⁰

Though such activities may seem marginal to our interest, one must not underestimate the importance of the bureaucrat-scribe for the development of scholarship and literature in Mesopotamian civilization. The very invention of writing owes its existence and its characteristic features to the needs of the bureaucracy. Writing served not only to record the designations of staples, materials, animals, etc.—that could have been done in conventional symbols (logograms)—but also to render personal names, which often had to be written phonetically. The resultant mixture of phonetic and logographic writing made the schooling of the scribe a lengthy and complex process which, in turn, severely curtailed literacy.¹¹ Despite the patent cumbersomeness and the phonetic inadequacies of the cuneiform writing system, it was obstinately maintained by the schools even though the scribes were well aware of its shortcomings. This is shown by their repeated attempts to present essential pronunciation differences, etc. by means of more or less consistent writing conventions evolved at certain periods and in certain regions. The training of the scribe involved, moreover, the teaching of Sumerian, although the degree of his knowledge varied widely from the mechanical use of an inventory of key phrases, formulae, and even verbal forms to a rather adequate linguistic understanding of that language. The resultant bilingualism of the scribal tradition maintained itself as long as clay was used as writing material.¹²

As important as the requirements of content, wording, and spelling were those of the spatial arrangement of the text on the clay tablet in lines, columns, and paragraphs. Each line or group of lines contains a meaning unit and within it the bits of information appear likewise in an established sequence. The careful arrangement of the inscribed surface goes even beyond the stress placed on the line pattern; it includes the sophisticated use of empty spaces to convey meaning, the distribution of horizontal and vertical (single or double) division lines, the use of columns, subscripts, etc. This discipline of the bureaucrat-scribe left its imprint on scholarly and literary texts, from omen collections to annals and hymns. It has helped to preserve for us precious information and, at the same time, has produced that terseness, abruptness, and formalistic elaboration that often hamper our understanding of texts written in this way.

Let me now turn to the poet-scribe. I propose to use this term not only in reference to scribes who wrote, collected, or rearranged what we call poetry, that is, epic and hymnic pieces, but also to include what are called in Assyriological parlance "royal inscriptions." Such compositions of very varying length appear on votive offerings and on royal foundation documents, which refer—often in great detail and with much elaboration—to the erection of a temple or palace. The large number of such documents, from the Sumerian rulers of early Lagash to such foreign kings as Cyrus and Antiochus I, has given us essential information on Mesopotamian political history, on chronology, and on the personality of certain kings, their backgrounds and political aspirations. They represent, in fact, royal pronouncements that formulate the justification for the ruler's policies; they set forth his responsibilities toward the gods and toward his subjects; they list his achievements and his plans alike. These statements are the literary vehicle provided for the king by the literati and intellectuals in his entourage and as such reflect the political climate at court. In them traditional attitudes are expressed in such ways as to reflect the specific intents and ambitions of the ruling king.

The same purpose is served by royal hymns that sing the king's praises and by the rare epical creations that commemorate the achievements of certain rulers. In the very same milieu originate the poetic pieces that use mythological and folklore topics formulated and reformulated by the court poets for the entertainment of the king and his courtiers.

The influence of the court—rather than the temple¹³—on the tenacity with which Mesopotamian artistic, literary, and scholarly traditions maintained themselves for millennia in the face of far-reaching political, economic, and ethnic changes was crucial. That influence possibly should be related to what I would propose to call an internal cultural difference, that is, the dichotomy between the cultural level of the Mesopotamian rulers and that of their subjects. This gap is primarily neither linguistic nor ethnic, though such cleavages might well have coexisted occasionally. It seems that the kings of the Akkadi period, those of the empire of Ur and those who resided in the successive capitals of the realm, from Isin and Larsa to Babylon, likewise the rulers with Kassite names and the kings of the Chaldean Dynasty, were nearly all aware that they represented in some essential aspects a way of life different from that of the people over whom they ruled. Even as they ruled a country effectively, insured its prosperity, and engaged in large building programs that provided opportunities for the arts and crafts, they appear to have considered themselves somehow culturally inferior. This may well be due to the socio-economic situation that obtains again and again in the history of the entire region: a basic tension between urban settlements and the open countryside is typically resolved by a king whose background is non-urban, who rules the capital and, through his officials in provincial towns, the entire country. Such a ruler, be he of Akkadian, Amorite, Kassite, or Aramaic extraction, in order to establish his rule firmly, needs not only the military power that his tribal associations readily provide, but also the bureaucratic know-how of the city tradition, and equally important, the royal ideology that was nurtured and elaborated on by the poets and scholars of previous reigns.

For such a king it was appropriate and indeed necessary to maintain and to foster existing cultural traditions, the exponents of which were the intellectuals who catered to the mentioned needs. On the other hand, the background of these kings enabled

them to counteract the stagnation that such a cultural continuum was likely to produce: their far-flung family contacts, their dynastic marriages, their orientation toward overland trade and razzias produced an openmindedness with regard to foreign practices, products, and ideas that has left its mark, e.g., on the history of Mesopotamian technology with its repeated interaction of foreign influences and internal developments.¹⁴

The model outlined here is, of course, nowhere fully attested. Still, it can be said that the kings with non-Akkadian names residing in Isin and Larsa at the beginning of the second millennium were as instrumental in the preservation of the Sumerian legacy as Charlemagne was in the preservation of the classical tradition in Europe. Of other rulers we know much less. The intellectual flowering of the outgoing Old Babylonian Dynasty (second quarter of the second millennium) is a case in point, as it occurs at a time of marked decline in political power. Hardly any information is at hand that enables us to follow the fate of learning in the subsequent period of stagnation up to its revival at the beginning of the first millennium. Nevertheless, we have to give credit to the intellectuals, that is, to the "scribes" attached to the court, to those concerned with administrative and bookkeeping tasks, as well as to those who formulated policies by creating in their inscriptions, hymns, etc. a self-image of the ruler and an ideological context in which he could function adequately.¹⁵

What was the position of this last type of scribe in the court hierarchy? This is difficult to ascertain since Mesopotamian kings do not present themselves as surrounded by counselors and advisers; they refer to such officials (*māliku*) only when speaking of foreign rulers. It seems to have been imperative for the intellectuals at court to remain anonymous. Yet, we have indications that very high court officials called "chief scholar-experts" (*rab ummāni*) exercised important functions at both the Babylonian and the Assyrian court of the first millennium; some were quite powerful and others were famous as "sages."¹⁶

I will turn now to the scholar-scribes whose social context is not so well attested. As a matter of fact, they occur in two separate contexts: on the one hand, they are unattached professionals who live solely by their learning (and their credibility) without institutional support;¹⁷ on the other hand, their very learning and the services they are expected to render give them a special position at court. The scholar-scribes' special but not exclusive concern¹⁸ is with divination: by interpreting ominous signs and features they predict the future for the king, the country, and private citizens. This they do on the basis of elaborate textbooks. Such compendia on which many generations of scholars had worked constitute the largest body of organized text collections coming from Mesopotamia. A wide range of divination techniques is attested throughout the entire region where cuneiform writing on clay was used, from the Old Babylonian period to the time of the Seleucid rulers. As a matter of fact, scholarly divination represents the one achievement of Mesopotamian intellectual life that was fully and integrally accepted where the influence of that civilization spread beyond its homeland.

It is certainly not possible to speak here at length about the history and the reach of this intellectual phenomenon, its emergence from the folklore level, or the relationship between specific divination techniques and the social levels on which they are considered acceptable. What matters for the present is that Mesopotamian

divination was a thoroughly scholarly endeavor. When asked for advice, it was the expert's task to find in his compendia the passage or passages that either bore directly on the ominous event or feature, or could be interpreted in some way to do so. This applies to observations made accidentally as well as to phenomena provoked by the diviner himself. The compendia were arranged by topic in carefully organized sequences in order to facilitate their use. Each group and sub-group dealt with a well-defined feature, such as color, shape, number, location, or whatever was considered important to relate the observation to its interpretation. These texts constitute in many respects the main achievement of Mesopotamia's scribe-oriented scholarship: they are beautifully written and nearly all copies exhibit the same established and carefully maintained wording; there are copies provided with glosses explaining the meaning of rare words or giving variant readings. We even have commented editions and condensed (excerpted) texts for quick reference, as well as tablets with illustrations.

The nature of the niche occupied by these diviners is best illustrated by a passage from an old conjuration meant to provide clients for four professional experts, namely the baker, the innkeeper, the physician, and the diviner.¹⁹ Such a list admirably reflects the transition from the village to the town level, with the first "industrialists" taking breadmaking and beerbrewing out of the private household²⁰ and allowing the intellectuals (physician and diviner) to be paid individually for their services. It is only natural that the physician and the diviner were often drawn toward the royal court, which offered them not only economic security but also the reward of a special status. It even seems that the protection offered the diviner in the king's entourage fostered the development of the kind of abstract scholarship that produced all these compendia. This is suggested by the interest exhibited in the predictions of certain types of omens for court affairs or warlike events, attested at least as often as prognoses bearing on the expectations and fears of the private citizen.

In the first millennium a change in omen technique occurred: extispicy, that is, divination based on signs observed on the inner organs of slaughtered sheep, was replaced (at court, at least)²¹ by the observation of celestial signs (often, but inexact, called astrology), atmospheric phenomena, abnormal behavior of animals, etc., which led to the creation of more and more specialized scholarly compendia. At that time an unprecedented economic prosperity developed in Babylonia, which led to a new flourishing of the old cities whose inhabitants apparently provided ample livelihood for diviners. An ever increasing number of these specialists seem now to have been organized in local "schools" or groups of scholars following either special hermeneutic traditions or using slightly deviating codifications for their interpretations.²² We happen to know about these changes from the extant correspondence maintained by scholars from a number of Assyrian and Babylonian cities with the kings of Assyria concerning the interpretation of signs (mainly celestial) that could bear on such matters as royal decisions.

In this very period we encounter the optimal position of the Mesopotamian intellectual not only in terms of his income and status but also in terms of the widening of his horizon, which now reached into the purely abstract realm of mathematical astronomy. The parameters established during centuries of planetary observation were eventually transferred to Greek scientists, who based their theories of celestial mechanics upon them.

It stands to reason that the few "situations" outlined and discussed in this essay fall considerably short of exploring the manifold ways in which these scribes participated in the complex machinery of their society. I have neglected, e.g., such an important aspect as that of law and its application in the face of several extant codifications that attest to a scholarly interest in jurisprudence. Nor have I taken into account the evidence contained in technical handbooks, in tablets dealing with mathematical problems, in the extensive compendia used for the training of the scribes, which often bespeak a genuine interest in philological problems, and, to mention only in passing, the attempts of the scribe to record in some fashion such an elusive phenomenon as the melody of a song.²³ This was unavoidable in view of my attempt to deal primarily with the position of the intellectual or, better, the scribe as intellectual, in those sectors of Mesopotamian civilization where it is readily observable.

Rather than gather and present more data, one might turn for a moment to a comparative approach to obtain a proper perspective. However superficially this must be done, it might provide a clearer view of the over-all role of the scribe in Mesopotamia as against that of scribes in other societies. Here again, I prefer to approach the problem from a negative angle: the Mesopotamian scribes are not *a priori* connected with sanctuaries or other religious institutions; their activities occur without the stimulus of a sacred book or of a traditional collection of normative ("classical") writing, both bound to produce a continuity maintained by those who study such texts, comment upon them, engage in their exegesis, strive to emulate them or to relate them to the everchanging present by performing such functions as judge, moralist, or literary critic. Neither did the Mesopotamian scribes form a mandarinat in which advantages of social status insured recruitment, and qualifying examinations maintained the level of learning. Finally, one would have to stress the absence of a father-son relationship between teacher and disciple, which one often finds as a means by which tradition is safeguarded.²⁴

To sum up: it is apparent that there were but two ways in which the intellectual could function in Mesopotamian society—either as part of the palace organization or as an independent expert. In the former context the scribe's activities were essential for the proper functioning of the bureaucratic system. Eventually, his work transcended its purely utilitarian range inasmuch as he provided the head of the organization—the king—with topics and formulations for his written pronouncements. The image of the king created in such inscriptions was bound deeply to affect royal decisions; it also guided the ruler in dilemmas between traditional attitudes and personal ambitions. In other respects the scribe as intellectual and as poet functioned at the royal court much like the artist and craftsman, that is, by contributing to the splendor and fame of the palace. Literary creations devised for royal entertainment added as much prestige as did architectural displays and the luxuries of an appropriate living standard.²⁵

Though the scribe continued in these roles throughout the entire history of Mesopotamian kingship, the new economic situation that arose in the first millennium produced a new habitat for the scholarly scribe as an independent expert. Thus the situation in which the diviner acted occasionally in the second millennium, that is, as an unattached professional selling his services to individuals, now became typical, providing him with a socially relevant *raison d'être*. A new capitalism was created by

the economic change, the reasons for which are difficult to ascertain.²⁶ It appears that the ever enlarging overland trade, victorious wars, and the intensification of agriculture, concomitant with a revival of urbanization, contributed directly to that new prosperity in Babylonia. A new merchant class might well have provided the clientele for the diviners and interpreters of omens whom we find now in all Babylonian towns, small and large. The pecuniary rewards may well have increased their interest in assembling new compendia and devising new hermeneutic methods. This kept the intellectual tradition as effectively alive and flourishing as the largesse of any ruler eager to add scholarly luminaries to his court. It may well be that the prosperity of these private divination experts contributed to the proliferation of local school traditions²⁷ and eventually led to that curious survival of particular communes of specialized divination experts—"tribes" as Strabo calls them²⁸—in separate quarters of the large Hellenistic cities of Babylonia, like islands engulfed by a thoroughly changed surrounding.

REFERENCES

¹ When Mesopotamian scribes write about their craft they mainly dwell on two topics: the difficulties and vexations of their life in school (cf. S. N. Kramer, "Schooldays, a Sumerian Composition Relating to the Education of a Scribe," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 69 [1949], 199–215 as basic text; see also A. Falkenstein, "Die Babylonische Schule," *Saeculum* 4 [1954], 125–37 and *idem*, "Die Sumerische Schule," *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der M. Luther-Universität, Halle-Wittenberg* 5 [1956], 695–704); and the pride in their learning (cf. A. W. Sjöberg, "In Praise of the Scribal Art," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, 24 [1972], 126–31). There is hardly any allusion to the social advantages of being an expert scribe in contrast to the stress placed on this topic in the parallel Egyptian literature. There are only a few Assyriological studies concerned with the scribe and his craft: N. Schneider, "Der *d u b. s a r* als Verwaltungsbeamter im Reiche von Sumer und Akkad zur Zeit der 3. Dynastie von Ur," *Orientalia*, N.S. 15 (1946), 64–88 (a collection of references); B. Landsberger, "Babylonian Scribal Craft and Its Terminology," *Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress of Orientalists*, pp. 123–26; *City Invincible* (A Symposium on Urbanization and Cultural Development in the Ancient Near East . . . , University of Chicago) (Chicago, 1960), pp. 94–102; and A. L. Oppenheim, "A Note on the Scribes in Mesopotamia," in *Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger* (*Assyriological Studies*, 16 [1965]), 253–56. For other regions of the ancient Near East, see R. J. Williams, "Scribal Training in Ancient Egypt," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 92 (1972), 214–21; H. Brunner, *Altägyptische Erziehung* (1957); E. Otto, "Bildung und Ausbildung im alten Ägypten," *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache*, 81 (1956), 41–48; A. F. Rainey, "The Scribe at Ugarit, His Position and Influence," *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Science and Humanities* (1968), pp. 126–47; H. Otten, "Hethitische Schreiber in ihren Briefen," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung*, 4 (1956), 179–89; and A. R. Millard, "The Practice of Writing in Ancient Israel," *The Biblical Archaeologist*, 35 (1972), 98–111.

² A systematic attempt in this direction has been made by R. Harris in her forthcoming book, *Ancient Sippar, A Demographic Study of an Old Babylonian City* (*Publications de l'Institut Historique et Archéologique Néerlandais de Stamboul*, vol. 33). On the basis of about 2,000 legal texts from that city, dated within less than three centuries, nearly all bearing the name of their scribe, it has been established that there were relatively many scribes available for writing such documents. However, this does not seem to have been a remunerative occupation, as one comes only quite rarely across instances in which either fathers or sons of scribes wrote such texts. In Nuzi, however, the situation was different, probably due to the fact that the language of the documents was not that of the region, and scribes may have been rare and better remunerated. Here we can observe at least three generations of scribes, and this has been used to establish a relative chronology of the otherwise undated tablets (middle third of the second millennium). For the role of the scribe in the Old Babylonian period, cf. also F. R. Kraus, *Vom mesopotamischen Menschen der altbabylonischen Zeit und seiner Welt* (Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akad. van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde Nieuwe Reeks 136:6 [1973]), 18–31.

³ For a signal exception, see my paper "The City of Assur in 714 B.C.," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 19 (1960), 133-47.

⁴ A case in point is the passage in Ezekiel (21:21): "For the king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination: he made his arrows bright, he consulted with images, he looked in the liver."

⁵ Even when the poet selects the dialogue form as a vehicle for presenting arguments to vindicate divine justice as against evil in "The Babylonian Theodicy" (W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* [Oxford, 1960], 63-89), it is done without much cogency and persuasiveness.

⁶ See the remarks of S. C. Humphreys in this volume.

⁷ Though the lexical lists mention up to twenty-nine different kinds of scribes (*Materials for the Sumerian Lexicon*, 12, 80f., also *ibid.* 34, 67, 99, 233, 239), the documents know only of one specialized scribe, *ṭupšar-Enūma-Anu-Enlil*, 'scribe of the [collection of celestial signs called] Enūma-Anu-Enlil' (cf. *Centaurus*, 14 [1969], 90f., and see O. Neugebauer, *Astronomical Cuneiform Texts*, vol. 1, p. 14). For *zazakku*, see *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, s.v.

⁸ The designation *ṭupšarru* (in Sum. *d u b. s a r*) is used up to the late second millennium to denote both the scribe who wrote contracts and letters for a fee (see below) and the scholar-scribe; in the first millennium the latter was mainly referred to by the logogram *LU . ŠID*. In Neo-Assyrian texts *LÚ.A.BA* can be used for both. Only in the latter texts do we learn of a "chief scribe" connected with the palace. There is no evidence known to me that the scribes who wrote contracts (and letters) for private persons (see above, n. 2) actually received any compensation. However, since persons who made a nail mark on a tablet (instead of using a seal) were paid for this (see *The Assyrian Dictionary* sub *šupru* mng. 2b), it is reasonable to assume that a fee was paid to the scribe.

⁹ See my *Ancient Mesopotamia, Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (Chicago, 1964), pp. 95-109.

¹⁰ Though there is no evidence for it, one has to assume that the scribe as bureaucrat did not only keep records. In such a close-knit economic system, the assignment of workmen, the allocation of land to special uses, the processing of its yield, the utilization, storage, and redistribution of staples, all necessitate continuous decision-making on the basis of a direct quantitative knowledge of assets and needs. To maintain the flow of goods and services not only on the subsistence level but also on that of prestige, and to coordinate the ecological and social realities with the politically oriented demands of the moment, must have constituted an essential part of the functions of the scribe as bureaucrat.

¹¹ The problem of literacy in Mesopotamia is too complex to be discussed here. There are so many variables (regional, social, and expertise) involved that not even rough estimates can be suggested.

¹² The Sumero-Akkadian bilingualism affected nearly all levels of scribal activities in Mesopotamian civilization. From the incorporation of Sumerian literary conventions to the use of isolated Sumerian phrases and even words, a wide range of borrowings and often superficial imitations are in evidence. Each type of literary production, from a simple letter to an elaborate literary creation, must be investigated separately to establish the range and the depth of Sumerian influence.

See W. von Soden, *Zweisprachigkeit in der geistigen Kultur Babyloniens* (*Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-Hist. Klasse, Sitzungsberichte*, 235/1 [1960]). For the historical basis of the bilingualism, see F. R. Kraus, *Sumerer und Akkader: Ein Problem der altmesopotamischen Geschichte* (Amsterdam, 1970) and J. S. Cooper, "Sumerian and Akkadian in Sumer and Akkad," *Orientalia*, N. S. 42 (1973), 239-46.

¹³ The decreasing economic and political importance of the temple versus the palace was bound to affect the position of the scribes connected with that institution. The evidence, however, is not sufficient to gain any insight in this development.

¹⁴ For an example, see my paper "Toward a History of Glass in the Ancient Near East," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 93 (1973), 259-66.

¹⁵ The position of the scribe at court is illustrated by two characteristic but isolated passages: 1) In the final section of the Epic of Erra (see L. Cagni, *L'epopea di Erra* [1969], p. 128:53) there is a passage that suggests that the scribe (written *DUB.SAR* and *A.ZU*) could move from court to court in his quest for recognition and fame ("he will be honored in his native country"). 2) An inscription on a foundation tablet (Ebeling, E., et al., *Altorientalische Bibliothek*, I [1926], pp. 38f.) from an elaborate tomb

constructed by the scribe of King Aššur-uballiṣ I of Assyria (1365–1330 B.C.) shows that the author was a beloved favorite of the ruler and that he was so sure of his position that he built the tomb not only for himself but for all his progeny. We have no other document of that nature from Mesopotamia.

¹⁶ See Erica Reiner, "The Etiological Myth of the 'Seven Sages,'" *Orientalia*, N.S. 30 (1961), 1–11, and J. van Dijk in H. Lenzen, *Vorläufiger Bericht über die . . . Ausgrabungen in Uruk-Warka*, 18 (*Abhandlungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft*, no. 7 [Berlin, 1962]), pp. 44–52 on the Uruk tablet W. 20030,7 of the Seleucid period, which enumerates these sages (*apkallu*) and the kings under whom they functioned as well as their specific achievements. The list extends from the antediluvian period to Esarhaddon, king of Assyria (680–669 B.C.).

¹⁷ Even in the Old Babylonian period diviners tended to live in towns rather than in villages. The writer of the letter in O. Schroeder, *Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler der Königlichen Museen zu Berlin*, 16 (1917), no 22 complains about the lack of diviners in his village.

¹⁸ Physicians and purification experts seem to have worked under the same conditions as the diviners.

¹⁹ For the text, see H. Zimmern, "Der Schenkenliebeszauber," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, 32 (1919), 164–84.

²⁰ The Pliny passage (*Nat. Hist.* xviii. 107), which speaks of the appearance of bakers in Rome after the inhabitants had stopped making bread for themselves, is echoed in the Old Babylonian letter, *Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler* . . . , 16, no. 50. There someone complains that he had to buy bread as he had no hired man to grind the barley for him.

²¹ See my paper "Divination and Celestial Observation in the Last Assyrian Empire," *Centaurus*, 14 (1969), 125 and n. 56. Add to the letters mentioned there (R. F. Harper, *Assyrian and Babylonian Letters* [1892–1914], nos. 634, 975, 1202), the unique unpublished report K. 8909 (citing omens from extispicy collections) and the difficult text in *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets . . . in the British Museum*, 35 (1920), pl. 37f., edited in Th. Bauer, *Das Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals* (1933), pp. 85f. (note lines l. 12, r. 12, 14).

²² See Oppenheim, "Divination and Celestial Observation," pp. 123–35.

²³ See, to cite here only the most recent literature on the subject, O. R. Gurney, "An Old Babylonian Treatise on the Tuning of the Harp," *Iraq*, 30 (1968), 229–33, H. G. Güterbock, "Musical Notation in Ugarit," *Revue d'assyriologie*, 64 (1970), 45–52, A. D. Kilmer, "The Discovery of an Ancient Mesopotamian Theory of Music," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 115 (1971), 131–49, and *idem*, "The Cult Song with Music from Ancient Ugarit," *Revue d'assyriologie*, 68 (1974), 69–82.

²⁴ For the rare and late evidence for real or fictitious scribal families, see W. G. Lambert, "Ancestors, Authors, and Canonicity," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, 11 (1957), 1–14.

²⁵ The importance of intellectuals at court finds expression in the picture of the "ideal ruler" drawn by Assurbanipal (668–627 B.C.) in the description of his education (M. Streck, *Assurbanipal* [*Vorderasiatische Bibliothek*, 7], 2, 254f. 13–25, and Bauer, *Das Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals*, 2, 84 n. 3). He enumerates in detail his scholastic achievement even before mentioning his expertise in handling many weapons. What matters here is not that Assurbanipal exaggerates or even misrepresents his training for the rulership but that he (or the scribe who wrote the text) considers intellectual and physical excellence of equal importance for a king of Assyria. The entire passage takes up a similar *topos* from a hymn of the Sumerian king Šulgi (ca. 2094–2047 B.C.). See G. R. Castellino, *Two Šulgi Hymns* (1972), pp. 30 ff., where the king extolls his scholarship and education (lines 13–20, 132–36, 142–50, 216–18), his musical abilities (lines 155–174) as well as his hunting exploits (lines 58–111).

²⁶ The main reason for this state of affairs seems to be the replacement of clay as a writing material with parchment, papyrus, etc. for the recording of the business transactions of those engaged in overland trade. Clay tablets continued to be used mainly by the temple administrations and, quite sporadically, by private persons.

²⁷ See above n. 22.

²⁸ The pertinent passage is cited in my *Letters From Mesopotamia* (Chicago, 1967), p. 53.